

The Bush Credibility Gap: February 28th Homeland Security Speech

A comparison of the rhetoric in Bush's speech celebrating the creation of the Department of Homeland Security versus the reality of what he is proposing

Rhetoric	Bush Action
<p>“I proposed record funding for the first responders, \$3.5 billion in the current budget. I've also requested another \$3.5 billion in the 2004 budget.”</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ First and foremost, Bush actually proposed <u>reducing existing grants to state and local law enforcement agencies by at least \$1.2 billion</u> to pay for his “new” initiative. Under the headline “White House Plays Shell Game to Find Funding for State and Local Emergency Units”, CQ noted that “the fact is, according to the administration’s own budget documents, the Bush plan for funding first responders amounts to double-entry bookkeeping: changes in the ledger that would result in no net increase in the amount of federal funding flowing to cities, counties and states.”▪ An analysis of the President’s own 2003 budget request reveals that he only requested \$994 million more for first responders than was spent in 2002 (FY 2002: \$3.110 billion spent, Bush 2003 Request: \$4.104 billion) – <u>71% less than the \$3.5 billion in new money Bush promised.</u>▪ In August of 2002, Bush actually <u>vetoed more than \$400 million for first responders</u> Congress passed in a bipartisan homeland security bill.▪ <u>Bush actually froze money provided for first responders</u> under the continuing resolutions passed by Congress in 2002. As the Los Angeles Times noted, Bush “suspended awarding grants to aid these first responders to terrorist attacks.”
<p>“The Department of Homeland Security is charged with safeguarding our border and transportation systems. September the 11th taught us that terrorists will try to use the openness of our country against us.”</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ Despite this rhetoric, <u>Bush actually proposed to cut total “Border and Transportation Security” by \$284 million</u> in his 2004 budget. Additionally, “Customs and Border protection” receive only a 2.8% increase – barely keeping up with inflation, while “Immigration and Customs Enforcement” receives just a 2.1% increase – an after-inflation cut.▪ Bush’s 2004 budget proposes <u>almost no new money to hire any more INS or Customs staff.</u> Right now, There are currently more than 8,000 Customs inspectors at ports of entry - far below the previously reported need of 14,000 inspectors. Bush’s 2003 budget requested only about 600 more inspectors. Even if the previously stated need of 14,000 inspectors shrinks to 12,000 under the homeland security reorganization, Customs would need an additional \$252 million to hire an additional 3,400 inspectors beyond what the 2003 Omnibus provides.
<p>“We must understand and correct our vulnerabilities. And we need to know who's coming in and who's going out of our country.”</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ Despite this rhetoric, the Los Angeles Times reported under the headline “Bush Refuses INS Appeal for Money” that the White House <u>rejected a request by immigration authorities for more money to close a loophole in the visa system exploited by some of the Sept. 11 hijackers...</u> The Immigration and Naturalization Service sought \$52 million to pay for 441 more agents to pursue foreigners who overstay their visas. But the request was turned down.” [LA Times, 5/2/02]. When Congress passed \$25 million for this in 2002, Bush <u>vetoed</u> it in August.

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<p>“Inspectors will be posted at more than 20 ports around the world to examine high-risk cargo before it has set sail to our country.”</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ Despite this rhetoric, Bush <u>requested no money</u> for the Container Security Initiative either in the 2002 Supplemental Bill or his 2003 budget. When Congress provided \$39 million for it in the Supplemental, Bush vetoed it in August. The Omnibus includes just \$12 million of the \$57 million that Bush’s own Customs Commissioner says he needs to fully fund the initiative.
<p>“We've got brave and honorable men and women serving in our military, including the Coast Guard, ready to accomplish any mission they are given, and they will do so with courage and skill and honor.”</p>	<p>Despite this rhetoric, Bush’s <u>2003 and 2004 budget included absolutely no money for port security grants</u> despite the Coast Guard reporting in December that the first year cost of port security is at least \$963 million and that total costs over the next decade are \$4.4 billion. While Congress passed bills forcing Bush to spend \$250 million for port security, the President and GOP repeatedly rejected Democratic amendments to substantially increase this funding.</p>